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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001274

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR HMUSTAPHA AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/YERGER/MCDERMOTT  
DOD/OSD A/S LONG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 MEMBERS TO DAS HALE: HELICOPTERS  
AND SHEBA'A WOULD BE POWERFUL SIGNS

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In separate meetings August 28 and 29 with visiting NEA DAS David Hale, March 14 leaders welcomed U.S. commitments in Lebanon but expressed frustration that the U.S. had not yet provided helicopters to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Without helicopters, March 14 members claimed, the LAF could not assert itself effectively over Hizballah. Additionally, the March 14 leadership assessed positive steps to resolve the Sheba'a Farms issue would strengthen March 14 candidates during the next elections and strip Hizballah of one of its arguments to draw support.

2. (C) The March 14 leaders characterized ongoing violence in Tripoli as dangerous and damaging to their electoral prospects if it continues for too long. They stressed the need to form the National Dialogue in accordance with the Doha agreement and pushed for the involvement of the Arab League throughout. DAS Hale reaffirmed continued U.S. support to the "forces of moderation" in Lebanon and reiterated the importance of full implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701. DAS Hale also advised March 14 leaders to engage with U.S. officials continue to explain the challenges Lebanon is facing in their own words. End summary.

3. (C) Visiting NEA DAS David Hale, accompanied by Ambassador, NEA/ELA Lebanon Desk Officer, and Poloffs, met with members of the March 14 Secretariat at their headquarters in Achrafieh on August 28, including Secretary General Fares Souaid, Dory Chamoun (National Liberal Party), Antoine Haddad (Democratic Renewal Movement), MP Moustafa Allouch (Future), Camille Ziadeh (Lebanese Forces), MP Samir Franjeh, and Zaher Raad (Progressive Socialist Party). On August 29, DAS Hale, accompanied by Ambassador, Poloff, and Senior LES Political Advisor, met with MP Boutros Harb, Dory Chamoun, Minister of Economy and Trade Mohammad Safadi (Tripoli Bloc), Minister of Justice Ibrahim Najjar (Lebanese Forces), and Michel Mouawad.

LAF ASSISTANCE SHOULD  
INCLUDE HELICOPTERS  
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¶4. (C) March 14 leaders welcomed DAS Hale's message of continued U.S. support for Lebanon. However, they were adamant that to make an effective difference in building the capacity and capability of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the U.S. should provide helicopters as part of its military assistance package. Chamoun explained that helicopters would be perceived as a more powerful and visible sign of U.S. support than tanks or military training. DAS Hale replied that the U.S. was considering helicopters as part of the matrix of military options currently being discussed with the LAF. However, he cautioned that helicopters do not replace the need for sound LAF leadership.

SHEBA'A COULD PAY  
ELECTORAL DIVIDENDS  
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¶5. (C) The March 14 leaders argued that concrete steps toward resolution of Sheba'a Farms, if not a complete solution to that issue, could pay dividends for March 14's candidates in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Indirect negotiations with Israel could be useful, they said, suggesting Jordan's King Abudullah II could act as the third-party negotiator. DAS Hale replied that the U.S. supported regional and U.N. diplomatic efforts to resolve Sheba'a.

¶6. (C) They also expressed concern and bewilderment at Israeli engagement with Hizballah, instead of the GOL, to coordinate prisoner releases. Harb and others said this only strengthens the hand of Hizballah in Lebanon and reflects badly on the government. The leaders requested the U.S. use

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its influence with Israel to make the case that this type of involvement encourages, rather than diminishes, Hizballah.

BUT TRIPOLI  
COULD CAUSE LOSSES  
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¶7. (C) Many of the leaders feared that ongoing violence in the northern city of Tripoli could severely damage March 14's chances of electoral success there. Allouch and Safadi, both from Tripoli, characterized the situation as dangerous and getting worse. Allouch was particularly concerned that if the violence did not end soon, it would create tension in other areas. More people, he predicted, would move away from March 14 and take up more extreme views. Safadi refused to speculate as to who was providing weapons and money to some of the armed groups, but said that some leaders in Tripoli have played both sides of the fighting against each other. DAS Hale called the supply of weapons or money to armed groups a dangerous game. March 14, he said, has serious electoral challenges ahead and Tripoli could complicate matters more if it is perceived that March 14 is somehow involved with the armed groups.

MARCH 14 COMMITTED  
TO DOHA AGREEMENT  
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¶8. (C) Harb, Chamoun, and Souaid expressed their desire to see the National Dialogue begin sooner rather than later (no start date has been announced). However, they cautioned that both the form and content of the dialogue process remain problematic. They claimed that the March 8/Aoun opposition wants to expand participation and dilute the agenda to draw the focus away from the issue of Hizballah's weapons and the National Defense Strategy. March 14 leaders expressed their preference that the dialogue reflect what was agreed in Doha in May 2008. SYG Fares Souaid said that March 14 was especially keen to have Arab League participation in the dialogue throughout the process and not just during the opening session.

UNSCR 1701 AND

COMMUNICATION ARE KEY

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¶9. (C) DAS Hale reaffirmed U.S. commitment to Lebanon. He offered U.S. support for moderate voices in Lebanon, saying the future of Lebanon is important to the future of the Middle East region. However, he told March 14 that the unimpeded flow of weapons across the Syrian border into Lebanon is of great concern. He pushed for full implementation of UNSCR 1701, which calls for the complete disarmament of Hizballah, as essential to strengthen the institutions of the state, such as the LAF and the Internal Security Forces.

¶10. (C) Furthermore, DAS Hale advised March 14 to increase its engagement with U.S. officials to effectively explain Lebanon and its challenges.

¶11. (U) DAS Hale has cleared this message.

SISON